

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CGEN YO AFSP
SUBJ: CONSULAR STAFFING

REF: (A) STATE 264529 AND (B) STATE 263040 (C) BELGRADE 8227

1. REFTEL A, WHICH DISCUSSED CUTS IN CONSULAR STAFFING RECOMMENDED BY S/IG, WAS RECEIVED ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH REFTEL B, WHICH DISCUSSED IMPROVEMENT OF CONSULAR SERVICES. REFTEL C REPORTS THE EMBASSY'S ACCOMMODATION TO THE S/IG RECOMMENDATION. HOWEVER, THE EXCHANGE RAISES BROADER QUESTIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE TOUCHED ON IN ASSISTANT SECRETARY WATSON'S MESSAGE, ON WHICH WE COMMENT BELOW:

2. AT THE RISK OF APPEARING PAROCHIAL, WE WOULD URGE THAT, IN EXAMINING STAFFING OR OPERATION OF CONSULAR SECTIONS, FULL ATTENTION BE GIVEN TO THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. THESE, IN THE CASE OF YUGOSLAVIA, ARE EXEMPLIFIED BY (A) A DAY AND A HALF BY A LOCAL EMPLOYEE TO "WALKING" THROUGH LOCAL OFFICES THOSE NECESSARY PAPERS INVOLVING THE SHIPMENT OF REMAINS OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, A TASK HANDLED IN SIMPLE ARREST CASES TO REACHING AND PRODDING APATHETIC LOCAL LAWYERS TO FOLLOW UP ON THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES; (C) MORE HOURS DEVOTED TO ACTING AS A GO-BETWEEN, AND EVEN PROVIDING TRANSLATIONS OF LETTERS AND COMMUNICATIONS, FOR US CITIZENS INVOLVED IN THE SIMPLEST DISPUTES AND PROBLEMS DEALING WITH, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, A LESS THAN SYMPATHETIC

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AND ENERGETIC LOCAL CONSTITUENCY: (D) A DUPLICATION OF ALMOST EVERY EFFORT IN THAT VIRTUALLY EVERY QUERY AND EVERY MOVE HERE NECESSITATES ONE OR MORE FOLLOW-UPS.

3. CONTINUING ATTENTION NEEDS TO BE GIVEN TO THE DANGER OF EMPLOYEE "BURNOUT", A DANGER PRESENT IN VIRTUALLY EVERY CONSULAR OPERATION IN THE WORLD BUT MAGNIFIED AT POSTS SUCH AS BELGRADE

WHICH OPERATE WITHIN THE CONFINES OF AN INHOSPITABLE, OFTEN OBSTRUCTIVE WORKING ENVIRONMENT WHERE ALMOST EVERY QUANTIFIABLE END PRODUCT, I.E. VISA GRANTED, PASSPORT ISSUED, PROTECTION AND SOCIAL SECURITY CLAIMS CASE RESOLVED HAS INVOLVED MORE THAN THE USUAL NUMBER OF INTERMEDIARY STEPS, ALL HUMAN AND THEREFORE HIGHLY RESISTENT TO QUANTIFICATION. AS BARBARA WATSON SO ACCURATELY POINTED OUT DURING HER RECENT APPEARANCE BEFORE A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ON PROTECTIVE CONSULAR SERVICES (AIRGRAM 3734 OF SEPTEMBER 9, 1977), CONSULAR OFFICERS (AND SHE COULD VERY WELL HAVE ADDED LOCAL EMPLOYEES) ARE FOR THE MOST PART DEALING INTIMATELY AND OFTEN STRESSFULLY WITH TROUBLED HUMAN BEINGS. AS NOT ONLY THE CASELOAD INCREASES, BUT THE NUMBER OF COMPLICATIONS IN EACH CASE MULTIPLIES, THERE IS VERY GRAVE DANGER OF EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD AND CONSEQUENT EMPLOYEE "BURNOUT". STATISTICS ARE USEFUL GUIDELINES BUT ONLY T A POINT IN CONSULAR WORK, ESPECIALLY AT POSTS SUCH AS BELGRADE WHERE EMPLOYEE/WORKLOAD RATIOS MAY, AT FIRST GLANCE, PROVE MISLEADING.

4. SHORT OF "BURN-OUT", WE NEED, BOTH IN BELGRADE AND ELSE-WHERE, TO CONSIDER SOME OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WHICH DEAL WITH QUALITY AS WELL AS QUANTITY OF WORK BEFORE WE SPEAK OF CUTS. IS THE MARGINAL MENTAL CASE WHO HAS OBLIQUELY THREATENED TO KILL HIMSELF GOING TO HAVE THAT EXTRA FIFTEEN MINUTES WITH THE CONSULAR OFFICE? IS THE INEXPERIENCED VISA OFFICER GOING TO HAVE THAT EXTRA HALF HOUR TO DIG INTO THE REGS, TO REFLECT ON A TWIST OF INTERPRETATION OR TO DEVELOP ON PAPER A FLEETING INSIGHT

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WHICH COULD RESULT IN A PRECEDENT CASE? IS THE LOCAL STAFF GOING TO HAVE THOSE EXTRA MINUTES FROM AN OFFICER WHICH TRANSFORM A "DO IT BECAUSE I SAY SO" TO A "DO IT BECAUSE THIS IS THE BACK-GROUND AND THESE ARE THE REASONS" AND IN THE PROCESS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND THEIR OWN CAPABILITIES? IS THE PUBLIC GOING TO LEAVE THE CONSULAR SECTION (FOR MANY AMERICANS THE ONLY CONTACT THEY WILL EVER HAVE WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND FOR MANY LOCAL CITIZENS THE ONLY CONTACT THEY WILL EVER HAVE WITH THE US) REASONABLY SATISFIED THAT THE ENCOUNTER HAS BEEN PRODUCTIVE, COURTEOUS, THOROUGH, AND EFFICIENT?

EAGLEBURGER

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